Dr Graham
→ Susan Bond

Briefing note

CHIRON VACCINES, SPEKE, LIVERPOOL: INFLUENZA VACCINE

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency has today suspended Chiron Vaccines manufacturer's licence in respect of influenza vaccine for a period of 3 months with immediate effect. A result of this action is that the company will not be able to release any batches of their influenza vaccine to any market.

The company was due to supply about 20% of the UK requirement for 2004, with the first deliveries due by 13th September. The company was also due to supply influenza vaccine into the _____ and the USA during September and October. The company was committed to supplying up to 48 million doses to the USA.

Background information

Chiron Vaccines (formerly Evans Vaccines) whose manufacturing site is based in Speke, Liverpool, informed the MHRA at the end of August 2004 that some batches of influenza vaccine vials destined for the USA had failed sterility tests. The company assured the MHRA that single dose vaccine for the UK market was unaffected because of _____. However, the company reported that all batches of European and USA product had been quarantined pending the findings of an internal investigation into the sterility failures.

An expert inspector from the MHRA's inspectorate, accompanied by another inspector, visited Chiron's manufacturing site on 13th and 14th September on a fact-finding mission. They discovered that the company was first aware of problems relating to microbial contamination in an intermediate monovalent component of the trivalent vaccine in April 2004 and that their investigation had been running since then. Microbial contamination was found subsequently in product and the manufacturing environment. The first sterility test failures occurred in July in stock destined for supply to the USA. The inspectors were informed that the company's draft investigation report would be available on 24th September. Meanwhile no batches of influenza vaccine would be released. A report of the inspectors' visit was heard by the MHRA's Cross-Agency Vaccine Group on 15th September, when it was agreed that a further visit should take place following a review by the MHRA of the company's internal report.

The company's draft report was reviewed in detail on the 24th September by the Acting Director of the MHRA's Inspection and Enforcement Division and the expert inspector who had visited the site the previous week. They concluded that the report had not addressed the root causes of the contamination problems being experienced by the company. A "for-cause" visit to the site by two inspectors was arranged for 28th-30th September and the company was requested, in writing, not to release any batches of influenza vaccine to any market pending that visit.

The inspectors findings from the "for-cause" visit were presented to a meeting of the Cross-Agency Vaccine Group attended also by a representative from DH Infectious Diseases Division, one from DH Immunisation Policy unit and a [redacted] from [redacted] on 1st October. The inspectors listed 19 serious issues relating to microbial contamination and potential for microbial contamination in influenza vaccine production. These constituted a critical situation regarding sterility assurance of the production process, leading to potential and actual microbial contamination of the finished product by a pathogenic organism. The decision of the meeting was that the inspector's report should be referred to the MHRA's Inspection Action Group (IAG) for consideration of adverse licensing action.

The IAG is a non-statutory committee constituted to consider referrals concerning licensing issues and to make recommendations for adverse licensing action to the Licensing Authority, represented by the Director of the MHRA's I&E Division. The Group met on 4th October and recommended that Chiron Vaccines manufacturer's licence should be suspended immediately in respect of influenza vaccine for a period of 3 months. This decision was made as a result of the company's failure to comply with the requirements of good manufacturing practice resulting in a potentially serious risk to patients through the administration of a vaccine that may be contaminated.

The company has the right of appeal against continued suspension of the licence after the initial period of suspension, but the suspension remains in force pending any appeal. The suspension may be lifted at any time if the MHRA is satisfied that appropriate corrective actions have been taken by the company and that the MHRA is satisfied that the improvements will be maintained.

The suspension does not affect other products manufactured at the Chiron site in Speke.

If you wish to obtain more detail on the GMP issues identified, we would be pleased to host a teleconference or videoconference.

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